

CAMBODIA & SOUTH VIETNAM

March 9 – 25, 2013

Written by Richard Knapton: all photos and decorated by Bao Nguyen

“Sshhh, Giant Ibis, perched on that roost tree!!” Well before dawn we had driven into the open, dry dipterocarp forest that surrounds the village of Tmatboey in remote Preah Vihear province in northern Cambodia, and our local guide Chea was beckoning to us to look at a large leafless tree silhouetted against the lightening sky. On the tree were several Woolly-necked Storks, and a fine Giant Ibis, whose shape and colours became more apparent in the gathering dawn. Light came quickly, and we were soon admiring this exceptionally rare, critically endangered endemic – perhaps no more than 340 left. There were two here, they started calling – a loud bugling – and then took flight, a fine way to start the day! Fantastic!!



Figure 1. Giant Ibis



Figure 2. White-shouldered Ibis

Giant Ibis was just one of the many fabulous sightings we enjoyed on our Cambodia & South Vietnam tour – those exceptional White-shouldered Ibis, another critically endangered species, the splendid Bengal Florican that put on such a good show, that

stunning male Green Peafowl, those Siamese Firebacks, both Bar-bellied and Blue-rumped Pittas – the latter right out in the open, the many raptors from Black Eagle to Black Baza, incredible sunbirds including just awesome Black-throated and Mrs. Gould’ s, Vietnamese Cutias and Gray-crowned Crocias, stunning views of four species of bee-eaters, the many barbets and broadbills (those Black-and-red!!) and woodpeckers – especially those Great Slaty Woodpeckers and the fabulous White-browed Piculet – everyone’ s favourite!, and a plethora of kingfishers, woodpeckers, malkohas, trogons, minivets, leafbirds, babblers and laughingthrushes, spiderhunters, flowerpeckers, and mammals including macaques, langurs, mongooses, squirrels and Muntjac and Sambar deer! And --- the fantastic Spoon-billed Sandpipers and Nordmann’ s Greenshanks on our first day! Yes, lots of really fine sightings!

Day 1: March 9. Everyone had arrived in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) the day before – Clara, Lynn and Jay, George, Brian, Carlo and Richard – and we had arranged to meet in the hotel lobby at 4 am, for a Spoon-billed Sandpiper quest. Bao, our superlative guide for our whole tour, turned up, and a few minutes later our driver Anh, and soon we were off heading southeast through the sprawling suburbs of Saigon, across the Saigon River by ferry, and arrived at one of the arms of the Mekong River delta. Well, we shed shoes and socks, except Brian who almost escaped unscathed (but not quite!), and for the next 3 hours or so, we slogged and sloshed our way barefoot through knee-deep mud and “clam” tracks and occasional solid stretches of the mud flats looking for our target species. Lots of shorebirds; the most abundant were Greater and Lesser Sand-

Plovers, and Great Knots, with lesser numbers of Terek and Curlew Sandpipers and Snowy Plovers, and among them were ones and twos of several other species – Black-bellied Plover, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Sanderling, Red-necked Stint, Whimbrel, Far Eastern Curlew, and Bar-tailed Godwit, plus a handful of the “White-faced” Plovers *Charadrius dealbatus*, the taxonomy of which is still being worked out. There were several Common Greenshanks and we diligently scrutinized each one, until we found one of our target species, Nordmann’s Greenshank, actually three of them, the bicoloured bill, shorter legs and generally whiter plumage being fairly obvious. However, it was on our way back, as the tide came rushing in, that Bao finally spotted two of our main target species, Spoon-billed Sandpiper. They were in shallows, with other shorebirds, and their distinctive foraging behaviour, weaving back and forth with that peculiar bill was obvious through binocs. Once the scope was on them, then at a certain angle the odd shape of their bill was apparent. Excellent! However, reluctantly, we had to leave the birds as the tide was really coming in, and we waded back to shore.



Figure 3. Spoon-billed Sandpiper

There were other goodies here; three species of terns – Little, Gull-billed and Caspian, and both Great and Little Egrets, and Barn Swallows, a species we were to see just about every day. We made our way back to land, and a well-earned early lunch at a shoreline restaurant, where we added some landbirds to our tour list – Plaintive Cuckoo, Red Collared and Spotted Doves – almost daily birds, Yellow-vented Bulbul, Black Drongo, Sooty-headed Bulbul, several Plain-backed Sparrows and White-rumped Munias. At a small sand quarry we found our first bee-eaters, Little Green, no doubt nesting in the sand banks, and we added Plain Prinia, Chinese Pond Heron, Brown Shrike and Germain’s Swiftlets on our way back to Saigon, as the heat of the afternoon set in. .

Day 2: March 10. Off we went today through the horrendous traffic of Saigon, skillfully navigated by Anh, to the hill country of Dalat. The commoner species of open country birds were with us, and we added a few more – Black-shouldered Kite, a very handsome kingfisher – White-throated, a species we were to see on many days, Burmese Shrikes dotted the overhead wires, Chinese Pond-Herons and Cattle Egrets foraged in the rice paddies, and our first of several Shikras. We



stopped at a restaurant at Magadui for lunch, having fine views of Eastern Crimson Sunbird right beside our table, a Purple-throated Sunbird close by, and fly-bys of Common Kingfisher and Streak-eared Bulbul

We turned off the main road and made our way to a waterfall park, where we spent a couple of productive hours in the late afternoon. Our first barbets showed up – excellent looks at Annam and Blue-eared Barbets, copulating in the scope (sort of), a couple of cuckoo-shrikes – Large and Indochinese, two new swifts – House and the widespread

Figure 4. Black Bulbul

Asian Palm, a fleeting look at a Eurasian Hoopoe, a pair of Slender-billed Orioles, lots of Ashy Drongos, a pair of Black-naped Monarchs, and many Black Drongos – a very common bird in this area. Brian found a couple of Black-crested Bulbul – a very smart bird, we had flyovers of a few Asian Fairy Bluebird – finally finding one perched for scope views, both Common and Dark-necked Tailorbirds foraged in the underbrush, a couple of Yellow-browed Warblers foraged in the

upper canopy – we were to see this species very many times during our tour. A nondescript flycatcher was Asian Brown, a blue/turquoise flycatcher was Verditer, a flash of colours was a White-rumped Shama, a calling bird with a distinctive undulating flight was a Gray Wagtail, crows were identified as Southern Jungle, split from Large-billed, and in a fruiting tree we had two Thick-billed and two Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers, for a nice finale to the afternoon. We also added our first mammal, Pallas' s Squirrel – mammals were few and far between throughout our tour! On the road again, and we arrived at our lodgings just as night fell.

Day 3: March 11. We were off and out early today, as we headed for the Ta Nung Valley, where we spent the morning. This valley is very birdy! We were greeted by a large, busy flock of White-cheeked Laughingthrushes that moved noisily through the pines, and with them were a couple of Black-headed Parrotbills. A Eurasian Jay was mobbed by a pair of Ashy Drongos; these jays look very different from the same species in Europe. As we walked slowly down the track, being serenaded by the persistent calls of Collared Owlet, we added many new species that came thick and fast. Three species of barbets, including the often difficult and elusive Red-vented; three minivets – Gray-chinned, Long-tailed and Scarlet; the stunning Blue-bearded Bee-eater, a fine bird!; five species of bulbuls including Red-whiskered, Flavescent and Mountain; a fabulous Mountain Hawk-Eagle, perched long enough for all to have excellent scope views; a Green-billed Malkoha, the first of many; the range-restricted Dalat Shrike-Babbler, thought to be a vireo!; Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos - largish glossy-black birds that when they flew looked like they were being followed by a couple of black butterflies – the rackets at the end of their tails. A flash of gray and yellow and there was a Gray-headed Canary Flycatcher, a flash of green and yellow and we were onto a Yellow-breasted Warbler, a flash of gray, black and white and we were onto a White-throated Fantail, and a flash of grays and white came from an elusive Slaty-backed Forktail. Loud calls from the valley floor signalled the arrival of Yellow-breasted Green Magpies, and constant fussing notes came from a flock of Mountain Fulvettas. We found two species of sibilias, Rufous-backed and the striking Black-headed, and two more flycatchers – a Taiga Flycatcher and the charming Little Pied Flycatcher. A bottlebrush tree was

being visited by Black-throated Sunbirds and an aggressive territorial Streaked Spiderhunter. Perhaps the highlight of our visit was a group of the highly endangered Gray-crowned Crocias, which put on quite a show for us, including courtship behaviour. Perhaps the



Figure 5. Streaked Spiderhunter

highlight of our visit was a pair of the highly endangered Gray-crowned Crocias, which put on quite a show for us.

We opted for an early lunch at the tourist attraction at Datan La Waterfall where we had a fine time birding the tree canopy from the restaurant deck. We had excellent views of a parade of species, including Green-backed Tit, a group of Blue-winged Minlas, a Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike, several very close Kloss' s Leaf Warblers – foraging on caterpillars and in full song, a couple of the attractive Gray-crowned Tits and Black-crested Bulbuls, our first Mugimaki Flycatcher, a couple of Vietnamese Greenfinches, and great views of both Mrs Gould' s and Black-throated Sunbirds. Back to the hotel for a siesta, and Asian House



Figure 6. Verditer Flycatcher

Martins and House Swifts, and then in mid-afternoon we headed for the Dalat Flower Garden and a lake at the back of the garden that was particularly productive. Several Little Egrets and Chinese Pond Herons foraged along the lakeshore along with Yellow Bittern, White-breasted Waterhens and Common Moorhens, and shorebirds were here – Little Ringed Plovers, Common



Figure 7. Burmese Shrikes

the horses. In the pasture was a Richard's Pipit and a group of Nutmeg Mannikins, and in the gardens were several Burmese Shrikes, somewhat oblivious of us – this neat shrike was a daily bird for us whilst at Dalat. Off to the hotel for dinner and the end of a very birdy day.

Day 4: March 12. This morning we were up and away early to Lang Biang Mountain, where we drove to the entrance gate and then took a jeep to the trailhead. The trail follows a ridge in the mountains and ends at the summit: we went about three-quarters the way to the top. We started with a bang – a male Silver Pheasant strolled across the forest floor, affording the occasional good look. This was followed by splendid views of the endemic Vietnamese Cutia, and we watched a group of three foraging on pines close to the trail. Both Golden-throated and Annam Barbets put in appearances, a couple of Large Cuckoo-Shrike called and eventually flew over us, landing prominently in a tree, Mountain Imperial Pigeons flew over, tits included a new species – the smart Yellow-cheeked, and so did flycatchers – a male Snowy-browed. Gray-bellied Tesias sang loudly close to the trail but refused to show themselves, another loud song from the forest floor emanated from a Lesser Shortwing, more like a shadow, a sharp callnote and we were on to Rufous-capped Babblers, and a song Bao recognized turned into Collared Laughingthrushes, one of the main target birds of this mountain, but another species that remained out of sight. A quick

Sandpipers, several Pin-tailed Snipe and a superb male Greater Painted Snipe – excellent record! Both Common and White-throated Kingfishers were here, as were Crested Myna and several Common Mynas, and three species of starlings – Black-collared, White-shouldered and Vinous-breasted, foraging among

warble and we were on to a couple of Dalat (White-browed) Shrike-Babblers, and moving through the brushy areas were Black-crowned and Mountain Fulvettas. On our way back we found a group of Gray Bush-Chats, the only ones of the tour. After a siesta, we drove to the far side of the lake and strolled along the road past a series of new condos, and added a few new species. An Osprey floated over the lake, a Crested Serpent-Eagle called and circled overhead, a couple of the non-chestnut-vented Chestnut-vented Nuthatches were finally located, along with the usual fulvettas, barbets, cuckoo-shrikes, orioles, fantails and bulbuls. The endemic Vietnamese Greenfinch put on a good show for us, as they came down to a pool to drink.



Figure 8. Dalat (White-browed) Shrike-Babbler

Day 5: March 13. Off once again before the crack of dawn, this time to a new birding location in these highlands, Bidoup National Park. We arrived, were greeted by the researchers studying fish rearing, and then walked around the fish ponds, took a trail to the river, and then out along the entrance road. We found goodies almost immediately. A pair of Large Niltavas was foraging by the ponds, and in the same area a couple of Long-tailed Broadbills was called in,

several White-bellied Erpornis (another vireo!) appeared, and a pair of Red-headed Trogons turned up. Whilst watching these, a Bay Woodpecker at its nest hole was discovered. The walk to the river turned up an assortment of kingfishers, malkohas, barbets including excellent views of Golden-throated, drongos, bulbuls,



Figure 9. Mountain Tailorbird

flycatchers and sunbirds. A flock of 12 Black-hooded Laughingthrushes was a highlight, as was a Spotted Forktail at the river and a Maroon Oriole by the



Figure 10. Vietnamese Cutia (male)

Cutias, as well as fulvettas, minlas and sibias. Afterwards, we travelled a little further along the road, to a pull-off where we could see the river, and sure enough after a little searching we found our quarry – a Plumbeous Water Redstart perched on a boulder in the river.

After lunch, we left DaLat and headed for Di Linh, in torrential rain! We checked into our hotel, the rain ended, and we walked around the paddyfields in the late afternoon. It was pretty quiet, we added Siberian Stonechat, and some of us saw a Common Snipe, Greater Coucal, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, and Plain Prinia, but rain clouds were gathering so we packed it in and headed back to the hotel.

ponds. Along the road, we first found Yellow-cheeked Tits, followed by excellent views of Yellow-billed Nuthatches, a very co-operative Mountain Tailorbird, a couple of *Seicercus* warblers – White-spectacled and Gray-cheeked, a confiding flock of Black-headed Parrotbills, two more Vietnamese

Day 6: March 14. Up early once again, and we headed out to a forested area to try for a scarce local species, Orange-breasted Laughingthrush. Well, despite our best efforts, we didn't even hear one, let alone spot one, but we still had some fine sightings. A Black Eagle glided overhead before folding its wings into a stoop, a couple of Crested Serpent-Eagles called and circled overhead, a couple of Red Junglefowl were along a logging road, a group of White-crested Laughingthrushes flew across the road and into a coffee plantation, a couple of new doves turned up – several Barred Cuckoo-Doves and a few Emerald Doves, our first Coppersmith Barbet, and a couple of bee-eaters – another Blue-bearded and several Chestnut-headed. A Banded Bay Cuckoo perched in the open and



scoped was a good find.

A couple of Velvet-fronted Nuthatches foraged in the open – we ended up with four species of nuthatches on our tour – and we added another bulbul, Puff-throated, a new leafbird, Orange-bellied, and two new babblers, Gray-throated and

Figure 11. Crested Serpent-Eagles

Black-chinned Yuhina, to our expanding list. A fussy group of birds were Japanese White-eyes, the only ones of our tour. Clara spotted a Slaty-backed Forktail, yet another Mugimaki Flycatcher was located, and raucous calls indicated another Yellow-breasted Green Magpie close by.

We left Di Linh, and headed for our next location, the superb Cat Tien National Park, a park that contains species that occur only here and in eastern Cambodia. It protects the largest remaining area of lowland tropical forest in southern Vietnam. Arriving in late afternoon, we checked in, settled into our rooms, then went for a walk west along the concrete path. We were in the lowlands now, so a new suite of everyday birds appeared – Bronzed and Greater Racket-tailed

Drongos, Thick-billed Green Pigeon, Green Imperial Pigeon, our first parakeets - Red-breasted, Red-rumped Swallow, Gray-eyed Bulbul, Pale-legged Leaf Warbler, Dark-necked Tailorbird among them. Brian spotted, of all secretive birds, a Blue-rumped Pitta hopping along the side of the road in plain view before it disappeared into the underbrush, and to cap off a fine day, a Great Eared Nightjar called and flew overhead. A Black Giant Squirrel was a welcome addition to our mammal tally, and at night some of us were serenaded by Tockay Geckos, a huge and incredibly loud lizard!

Day 7: March 15. We were up before dawn, for an early breakfast and the wailing sounds of Buff-cheeked Gibbons, and a walk east along the trail for about 2 km. A flyover Black Baza was a good start, Silver-backed Needletails flashed overhead, as did Asian Palm Swifts, and a couple of Asian Pied Hornbills moved from tree to tree in front of us. We did well for woodpeckers this morning - Greater Yellowknape, Greater Flameback, White-bellied and Laced Woodpeckers, rollers were here, both Indian and Dollarbird, and a Coppersmith Barbet kept up its monotonous call notes. Broadbills are a neat family of birds, and we had superlative views of stunning Black-and-red Broadbills. Large Woodshrikes appeared, and both Common and Great Iora turned up - we were to see



Figure 12. Black-and-red Broadbill

these just about every day. A brown, barred cuckoo was a female Violet, we had our first Asian Koel, and a Banded Kingfisher called from deep in the forest. Tiny, sparrow-sized parrots flew over - Vernal Hanging Parrots, and a new minivet appeared - a group of Ashy Minivets, and two new orioles - Black-hooded and Black-naped. A group of medium-sized black birds with long oddly-shaped tails were Racket-tailed Treepies, and we picked up a new bulbul - Black-headed, and new babbler - Puff-throated. Gray-faced Tit-Babblers moved through the underbrush in loose noisy flocks - this is a regional endemic, and we spotted a

trio of smart birds – Oriental Magpie-Robin, White-rumped Shama and Siberian Blue Robin. A flash of blue and we picked out a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, a dose of green was a Golden-fronted Leafbird, and a study in stripes and spots was a female White-throated Rock Thrush – we were to find a male later in the tour. Sunbirds were widespread – Ruby-cheeked, Eastern Crimson and Olive-backed, and a new spiderhunter turned up – Little – drinking from a pool of water in a leaf.



Figure 13. Siberian Blue Robin (winter plumage)

Back at the lodge for a siesta, and torrential rain accompanied by lightning for much of the afternoon, but it eased up so we went for a short walk along the road. We spotted a pair of Red Jungle Fowl, we scoped two green pigeons on the tops of bamboo – both Orange-breasted and Ashy-headed, lots of Oriental Pied Hornbills flew through the open woodland, and two new mynas showed up – Hill and the striking Golden-crested. We also added Northern Treeshrew and more Cambodian Striped Squirrels to our mammal list.

Day 8: March 16. Today we drove the 9 kms to the entrance to the Crocodile Lake trail entrance; we birded the road for a while, then went on a walk to the Big Tree, and back. The drive there was enlivened by superb views of a male Siamese Fireback along the road and on the edge of the vegetation – there may have been a second a little distance in. At the trail entrance, a Black-shanked Douc Langur showed itself to some of us, before melting back into the forest. Once again we were treated to a parade of parakeets, green pigeons, malkohas, woodshrikes, ioras, bulbuls, babblers, drongos, tailorbirds, orioles and more. Barbets this morning included a new one, Green-eared, the seventh barbet of our tour – not so bad! One of our target species was Bar-bellied Pitta, and we had one stunning individual, which managed to show itself to all after much hiding behind stumps and logs! A new babbler popped up, Abbott’ s, and we caught up with another leafbird, Blue-winged. Certainly one of the highlights of the day was an Orange-breasted Trogon that perched co-operatively on a cross branch for all to see. On our drive back, a water monitor scuttled across the road, then it was time for lunch and a siesta.



Figure 14. Blue-rumped Pitta

We gathered again at 3 pm, to walk the short loop trail, past the Asian Black Bear enclosure. Along the trail photographers had set up blinds to take pictures primarily of pittas; well, at the first blind, there, at the back of the clearing was a fine Blue-rumped Pitta –

just amazing views! Puff-

throated Babblers were at another clearing, otherwise it was very quiet, other than some rather neat Agami Lizards! Back at the lodge, we boarded a truck and headed off to the grasslands, driving about 5 kms out and walking back about one to two kms. The grasslands proved highly productive! Pride of place must go to the superb male Green Peafowl spotted walking along the edge of a cleared

area, and we had the bird in sight for minutes – excellent! A couple of Woolly-necked Storks flew leisurely past us, an Osprey perched way out in the grasslands, Red-wattled Lapwings kicked up a fuss as we walked by, and George picked out a Banded Bay Cuckoo. Pigeons and doves were well-represented – among the common Green Imperial Pigeons and Red Collared and Spotted Doves were a couple of green pigeons – Orange-breasted and Ashy-headed. New cuckoos turned up – several Lesser Coucals and a perched Asian Koel, and lots of Indian Rollers were out over the grassland; scope views of individuals in the afternoon sun were a treat. Ten Blossom-headed Parakeets swept by, lots of Ashy Wood Swallows hawked insects, a new drongo – Hair-crested (Spangled) – was spotted, several Rufescent Prinias turned up, as did several Pied Bushchats and a couple of Oriental (Paddyfield) Pipits. Chattering calls from a tangle came from a couple of Chestnut-capped Babblers, and chunky birds perched in a leafless tree were scoped and proved to be Golden-crested and White-vented Mynas and Vinous-breasted Starlings. We also spotted a Sambar Deer, watching us at a safe distance, and a Muntjac, as well as a group of Long-tailed Macaques. At dusk, we had fine views of Great Eared Nightjars and some of us glimpsed a Brown Hawk-Owl.



People 1. On the way to Crocodile lake

Day 9: March 17. Our last morning at Cat Tien, and we chose to take a truck ride to Heavenly Gate Rapids, for a walk through forest and bamboo thickets. Once again we were treated to lots of goodies. We had excellent looks at two Great Slaty Woodpeckers, that called excitedly and displayed in the canopy, the largest of the world's woodpeckers, and this was followed by splendid looks at a White-browed Piculet, one of the smallest – this superb bird put on quite a show, and was a candidate for Bird of the Tour! We had good looks at an Asian Drongo-Cuckoo, through the scope, and equally good looks at a couple of Black-and-buff Woodpeckers, another very fine bird! An Indochinese Ground Squirrel ran across the trail, for yet another new mammal. Then it was time to head back to the lodge, pack, and leave. Soon enough we were at the airport, had a slow pizza dinner, and then were aboard the 45 minute flight to Sien Reap in Cambodia. Going through customs and acquiring visas went smoothly, and we were soon settling into our hotel, ready for tomorrow's visit to Angkor.

Day 10: March 18. Today was a fairly leisurely day, visiting the amazing archaeological ruins at Angkor Thom, the Elephant Terrace, Ta Prohm and Angkor Wat. We still managed some birding – the three circling Black Bazas were a nice find, as was were the two Blue Rock Thrushes at Angkor Wat.



People 2. Visiting Angkor Temples (Lynn)

Day 11: March 19. After yesterday's easy day, we were up and away very early today, as we had scheduled meetings with guides and guardians. We first headed north to the florican grasslands, spotting a Changeable Hawk-Eagle on the way as well as Black-shouldered Kite, we stopped by a raised dyke, had a field breakfast, and were ready for the goodies. And goodies there were! We spotted two male Bengal Floricans, walking in grasslands among cattle, occasionally calling and a couple of times in display flight – excellent! A major target bird, and indeed here they were! Here also were three species of harriers – Eastern Marsh, Hen and the very striking Pied, a Gray Heron took flight as we walked along the track, Spot-billed Ducks flew by in small groups, both Barred and Small Buttonquails were picked out along the track, lots of Oriental Pratincoles were here, and Bao, George and Carlo had Ruddy-breasted Crake and Pied Kingfishers. Passerines on the grasslands included lots of Striated Grassbirds and Zitting Cisticolas, many Siberian Stonechats, Oriental Pipits and Red-throated Pipits, some in summer plumage, as well as Pied Bushchats, several Bluethroats, a couple of Chestnut-eared Buntings and an Eastern Yellow Wagtail. In a muddy pond was a Wood Sandpiper and a Cinnamon Bittern, and both Australasian Bushlark and Oriental Skylark showed up. A furtive small brown warbler was likely Lanceolated Warbler, and two small estrildids were Red Avadavats.



People 3. Watching Bengal Florican

Leaving these grasslands, we headed towards Tmatboey, but we had a stop planned en route. In a highly degraded landscape, in a forlorn group of trees, we scanned the tree tops, and sure enough we eventually located our quarry, a couple of White-rumped Falcons, which we watched at leisure through the scope – excellent sighting. We had lunch by a temple, then drove to our lodge for a short siesta. A water drip at the lodge attracted several species – Hair-crested and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, Rufous Treepies, Sooty-headed and Stripe-throated Bulbuls, a Shikra, a Taiga Flycatcher, and a group of the arresting White-crested Laughingthrush – Carlo took some pretty fine pictures of this striking species. Then we were out once again, for some special target birds. We first visited a patch of open woodland, where our guides spotted an owl – through the scope it was a Brown Fish-Owl and it was mobbed by Purple



Figure 16. Bengal Florican (distance view)

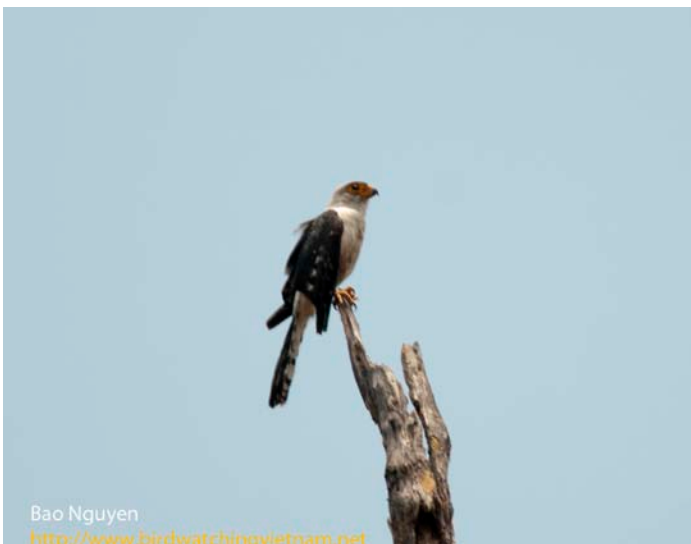


Figure 15. White-rumped Falcon

Sunbirds; here also was a Common Flameback, for a new woodpecker. We then visited another stretch of woodland where our guides found another owl – this time a Spotted Wood-Owl, that chose to fly before everyone had a chance to see it. Next we visited a stretch by a dry stream bed, and after some initial searching we found Pale-capped Pigeons, once again for scope looks. We also found Red-billed Blue Magpies here along with Blossom-headed Parakeets, and Clara and Richard had a Chinese Francolin, the first of many. Our final stop crossed more



Figure 17. Brown Fish-Owl

open woodland, picking up Rufous-winged Buzzard on the way, to a site for White-shouldered Ibis, and sure enough we found a group of eight, gathering at a pre-roost tree. Another critically endangered species, the world population is estimated to be around 500, with the promising reports that the population is slowly increasing.

Day 12: **March 20.** Today was our early morning drive to the Giant Ibis site, and not only did we see Giant Ibis, but also a Lesser Adjutant, another endangered species. These open woodlands are home to Chinese Francolins and we had good views of this elusive galliform. Lots of Woolly-necked Storks were here, as well as several raptors – Crested Serpent-Eagle, a dark-morph Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Rufous-winged Buzzard and Shikra, a new woodpecker – Gray-capped which was to become common in the next few days, a flyover group of Great Slaty Woodpeckers, our one and only Gray-headed Parakeet, our first White-browed Fantail and Dusky Warbler, several Rufescent Prinias, Golden-fronted Leafbirds and Purple Sunbirds, lots of Small and Scarlet Minivets, and fleeting looks at Brown Wood-Owl. Back at the lodge, Lynn found a male White-throated Rock-Thrush which put on a good show for all of us.

After a welcome siesta, we headed out again to look specifically for owls, nightjars and woodpeckers – and we succeeded. We first found a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, then had

open woodland, picking up Rufous-winged Buzzard on the way, to a site for White-shouldered Ibis, and sure enough we found a group of eight, gathering at a pre-roost tree. Another critically endangered species, the world population is estimated to be around 500, with the promising reports that the population is slowly increasing.

Day 12: **March 20.** Today was our early morning drive to the Giant Ibis site, and not only did we see Giant Ibis, but also a Lesser Adjutant, another endangered

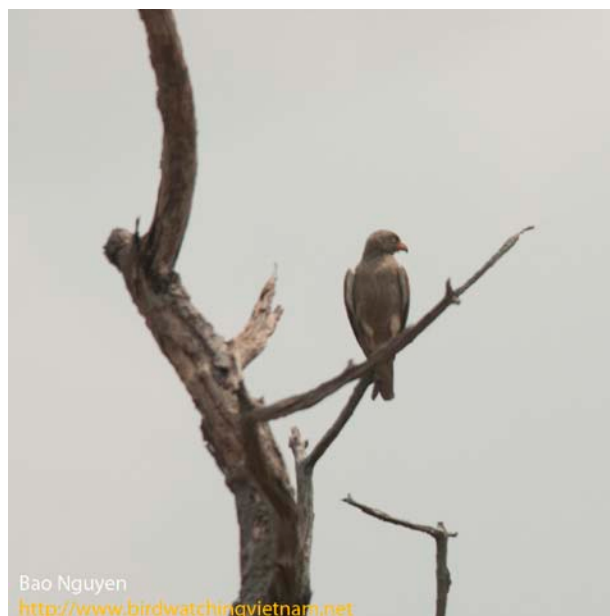


Figure 18. Rufous-winged Buzzard

excellent looks at a rare and localized species, Black-headed Woodpecker, 6 of



Figure 19. Rufous-bellied Woodpecker

them! We spotted two White-shouldered Ibis perched on a tree, for fine views, dozens of Blossom-headed Parakeets, a Chestnut-bellied/Neglected Nuthatch, and had a calling Indian Cuckoo. Our guides tracked down a Spotted Wood-Owl, which did not co-operate for many of us, Large-tailed Nightjars called at dusk and we could make out a Savanna Nightjar perched on a snag. Finally, we heard and finally found an Oriental Scops-Owl, for a pretty successful night bird day.

Day 13: March 21. After an early breakfast we visited wetlands and a river at Tmatboey. At a wetland were two Giant Ibis, busily foraging away, an Oriental Honey-Buzzard glided overhead, a Green Sandpiper flew down the river, an Orange-breasted Green Pigeon perched long enough for scope views, lots of Green Imperial Pigeons flew over, a Plaintive Cuckoo called plaintively, lots of Crested Tree-Swifts hawked insects, we had wonderful views of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters and White-bellied Woodpeckers, a couple of Two-barred Leaf-warblers, a noisy flock of Pin-striped Tit-babblers, and several Asian migrants – Siberian Blue Robin, Taiga Flycatcher, and a superb Siberian Rubythroat! In the afternoon, we walked back behind the lodge to a stake-out for Spotted Owlets, which, thankfully, were there, three or more of them. We were then deluged by torrential rain, and G, B



Figure 20. Spotted Owlet

and C had an unsuccessful foray for Spotted Wood-Owl!

A night drive turned up calling Asian Barred Owlet and Collared Scops-Owl, and then it was time to call it a day.

Day 14: March 22. We were up early, packed and left Tmatboey, and drove to Kampong Thon, stopping at several locations on the way. Black-shouldered Kite turned up again, as did Oriental Pratincole, a fine Eurasian Hoopoe, a Greater Flameback, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, White-rumped Falcon and several Brown Prinia, and Peaceful Dove, Collared Kingfisher, Black-nest Swiftlet and Gray-breasted Prinia showed up for the first time. We had a successful hunt for Indochinese Bushlark, and spotted a Peregrine hunting along the Mekong River at Kampong Thom. Perhaps the finest sighting of the day was a Collared Falconet, masterfully picked out by Bao – we watched this little predator for several minutes perched on an exposed snag, before it launched itself and zoomed down to the vegetation, grabbed a lizard and then returned to the same perch where it killed and ate the unfortunate animal. A Muntjac at the bushlark site was a nice mammalian addition to the day's list.

Day 15: March 23. We had a relatively late start today, as our main focus was a boat ride along the Mekong River. Terns out on the river were most likely White-winged. We first stopped at a local marsh, finding a Cinnamon Bittern, an Oriental Darter, several Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, our first Pied Kingfishers, Baya Weavers and Yellow-bellied Prinias. Zitting Cisticolas sang and performed aerial displays, Black-browed Reed Warblers sang but refused to show themselves, several Paddyfield Pipits were walking around the paddyfields (surprisingly enough!), and once more we encountered Plain-backed Sparrows and Nutmeg Mannikins. A flat tire slowed us down somewhat – during the time it took to fix it, we had recorded Osprey, Little Ringed Plover, Oriental Magpie-Robin and Pied Bushchat!

We arrived at our hotel unloaded our luggage, and then took off for our boat ride along the Mekong. Before arriving at the dock, we scoped a marsh where there were a couple of dozen Lesser Whistling-Ducks for a nice addition as well as several Spot-billed Ducks and an Intermediate Egret. A group of three Irrawaddy Dolphins was a fine sighting during our boat ride, as well as many Small Pratincoles, hundreds of Little Cormorants, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, a Pied Fantail,

several Gray-throated Sand Martins, and a scarce and range restricted species, a Mekong Wagtail.



Figure 22. Mekong Wagtail

Day 16: March 24. We had an early morning walk along the river outside our hotel, finding Common and Dark-necked Tailorbirds, Sooty-headed and Yellow-vented Bulbuls, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Common Sandpiper, and a couple of Radde's Warblers. We drove north to a turtle farm, where captive rearing and a release



Figure 23. Irrawaddy Dolphin

program is underway to protect several threatened species of turtles, and then

walked out onto the river islands where we found Mekong Wagtails again as well as Small Pratincoles, a Striated Heron, Little Ringed Plovers and Little Cormorants. We then returned to the hotel, only to find that our vehicle needed repair – but eventually it was fixed, and we were off to Pnomh Penh where we bid farewell to Bao, and had a fine goodbye dinner.

And so our tour came to an end! We had done well; good birding and birds, lots of species - around 335, interesting mammals including Irrawaddy Dolphin, reptiles including the astonishing Tokay Gecko, and amazing other wildlife, several spectacular and memorable sightings, fine scenery in quite an exotic setting, excellent guiding from Bao, and very good companionship – yes, a fine tour indeed!! See you all soon!